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Derks, A.M.J.

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Roman imperialism and the sanctuaries of Roman Gaul

Ton Derks

ARCHÉOLOGIE DES SANCTUAIRES EN GAULE ROMAINE. TEXTES RÉUNIS ET PRÉSENTÉS PAR WILLIAM VAN ANDRINGA (Centre Jean-Palmerie, Mémoires XXII, Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne 2000). Pp. 211 with figs, maps (7 are partly in colour), and photographs. ISBN 2-86272-202-2. FF 180.

One of the central issues when studying the material remains of sanctuaries in the Roman provinces is determining the impact of Roman imperialism on the religious practices of provincial communities. How were the pantheon, the spatial organisation and architecture of cult places, and the ritual practices of these communities affected by incorporation into the Roman empire? The collection of essays edited by the historian W. van Andringa, comprising contributions to a round table held in 1999, seeks to provide us with some answers. The 9 papers are divided into three sections entitled 'The Gallo-Roman sanctuary' (Scheid and Van Andringa), 'Sanctuaries and cities' (Dupraz, Magnan, Blin and Durand) and 'Tradition and transformation of sacred space' (Brunaux, Gaudefroy with Lepetz, and Gaidon-Bunuel). Although most of the papers offer enough new evidence to justify publication in their own right,¹ the volume's principal interest lies in its confrontation between archaeological information obtained from excavations and the historical interpretative framework developed for the study of ancient religion. In his brief introduction (9-16), the editor sets out the main features of this framework, together with some of the possibilities and limitations we encounter in archaeological sources when trying to answer the above questions.

The approach he adopts is conveniently designated the civic model. In its organisation of the religious landscape, it typically assigns a key role to the civic authorities of the *civitas*. This approach is justified given the view commonly held by ancient historians that the religious systems of the *civitates* in the Roman West were more or less faithful replicas of their counterparts in Rome (or in any other city).² The starting point for any research informed by this perspective should be the distinction between public and private cults.³ While public cults were financed by public means and organised for the benefit of the *civitas* as a whole, private cults were supported and funded by the constituent subgroups of the *civitas*, such as *pagi*, *vici* or kin groups. Thus, contrary to a prevailing view, a public cult is not necessarily the same as a collective cult or forms of worship associated solely with monumental architecture. Nor were public sanctuaries confined to the perimeter of the civic centre. The sanctuaries discussed in the second part — with locations in the heart of a *civitas* capital (Alba-la-Romaine), just outside the city walls of an ancient town (Meaux), in conjunction with a *vicus* (Jouars-Ponchartrain),

1 Since publication of the volume, two of the contributions have been superseded by more comprehensive reports. For the excavations at the important sanctuaries at Ribemont-sur-Ancre (Somme) and the Forêt d'Halatte (Oise), see respectively the extensive preliminary report by J.-L. Brunaux *et al.*, "Ribemont-sur-Ancre (Somme). Bilan préliminaire et nouvelles hypothèses," *Gallia* 56 (1999) 177-283, and the collective volume edited by M. Durand, *Le temple gallo-romain de la Forêt d'Halatte (Oise)* (RAPicardie, n° spéc. 18, 2000). The latter not only presents the evidence from four recent fieldwork campaigns, but reviews data from old excavations conducted in the 1870s. It includes a complete catalogue of all 358 stone ex-votos from the sanctuary.

2 Cf., for instance, Scheid in his contribution to the volume (21-22) and the authoritative account by M. Beard, J. North and S. Price, *Religions of Rome* (Cambridge 1998) 313 ff, 339 ff. For a critical view of the model, see R. L. Gordon, "Religion in the Roman empire. The civic compromise and its limits," in M. Beard and J. North (edd.), *Pagan priests. Religion and power in the ancient world* (London 1990) 235-55, and G. Woolf, "Polis-religion and its alternatives in the Roman provinces," in H. Cancik and J. Rüpke (edd.), *Römische Reichsreligion und Provinzialreligion* (Tübingen 1997) 71-84.

3 See also the pertinent remarks by Scheid in his contribution to the volume (22-23).

and in isolation in the countryside (Forêt d'Halatte) — are representative of the various possibilities. It was up to the municipal magistrature and priesthood to decide whether the cult of a particular deity should be publicly organised and inscribed in the community's official calendar. This would entail the annual voting of money from the public treasury for expenditure on rituals, sacrifices, and embellishments to the sanctuary. The latter suggests that the civic authorities played an important rôle in the development of sanctuaries.

In the successive architectural transformations of the sanctuaries in Gaul, Van Andringa identifies two significant periods of substantial change, each of which he links to the progressive integration of the Gaulish provincial communities. The first was the reign of Augustus, which saw the introduction of the first trappings of Roman cults (temples, altars and cult statues). Van Andringa associates this initial wave of intensive building activity with the establishment of new *civitates* and their capitals and the mark they left on the religious landscape, not just in the centres of the new civic communities, but also in the countryside they administered. The second period of change, fixed roughly between Claudius's reign and the end of the 1st c. A.D. and rightly described as the monumentalisation of sanctuaries, is linked to institutional changes among the civic communities, in particular the granting of *ius Latii*.

Although the approach adopted has its merits, it is not without its problems. Archaeologists, for instance, will be concerned that classification must remain a matter of conjecture in all cases where there are no inscriptions testifying to the involvement of a *civitas* in the management of the sanctuary.⁴ In such instances, we have to make an educated guess based on the spatial context of the sanctuary, the monumentality of its buildings and furnishings, as well as on the number and quality of the 'ex-votos'.⁵ A further complication is the fact that individual worshippers may well have erected private dedications in public sanctuaries. Consequently, finds of private inscriptions do not necessarily mean that the cult or sanctuary was a private one. Thus while, by virtue of the underlying assumptions, it is often a hazardous undertaking to apply the model to the sanctuaries of Roman Gaul, it would be altogether impossible to apply it to the religious landscape of the pre-Roman period: after all, civic institutions were not introduced until after the Roman conquest. However, since we can only comprehend the mass deposition of weaponry and human remains in Iron Age sanctuaries (such as those at Ribemont-sur-Ancre or Gournay-sur-Aronde) in terms of collective undertakings firmly controlled by local war-leaders, we might perhaps infer the existence of an analogous distinction in the pre-Roman Iron Age, albeit without the formal judicial connotations that are typical of the Roman institutional context.⁶ Of course, a final disadvantage of the civic model is that it cannot account for the transformation of private sanctuaries. Here, it seems logical to suppose that the public sanctuaries of a particular *civitas* to some extent served as models for their private counterparts.

Despite these weaknesses in the model, for the present reviewer the advantages weigh more heavily. On the one hand, the model takes account both of ancient perceptions of religious organisation and of approved heuristic values, while, on the other, it has the advantage of steering us well clear of the alternative, antithetical thinking which still persists in so many archaeological accounts. As Van Andringa rightfully emphasises, we cannot hope to understand the Romanisation of the religious landscape unless we interpret archaeological data against the background of the progressive integration of Gaulish provincial communities into

4 Van Andringa acknowledges the problem in his discussion of the sanctuary in the forest of Halatte (13).

5 For an attempt along these lines, cf. T. Derks, *Gods, temples and ritual practices. The transformation of religious ideas and values in Roman Gaul* (Amsterdam Archaeological Studies 2, 1998) 185 ff.

6 In general, the existence of Late Iron Age public institutions is suggested by historical sources as well as numismatic evidence, in particular the minting of gold coins. Cf. also Brunaux *et al.* (supra n.1) 236 on the sanctuary at Ribemont-sur-Ancre: "Le caractère public de l'ensemble est désormais bien affirmé, tant dans l'architecture que dans les vestiges culturels, et ceci aussi bien pour le trophée gaulois que pour le lieu de culte romain qui s'y superposa".

the framework of the Roman empire. Given the fact that, for any given *civitas*, cults with local roots were just as likely to be adopted in the official calendar as those imported from Rome, it seems unhelpful to apply the traditional, essentialistic label of either 'Celtic' or 'Roman' to a cult or sanctuary. The differences between indigenous and imported cults that may have existed initially disappeared quickly during the Augustan-Tiberian period. Consequently, any attempt to cling to such opposing concepts betrays a strong preoccupation with the evolutionary concept of origin rather than an interest in a true understanding of the *organisation* and *workings* of a cult.⁷ Given the tenacity of the Celtic-Roman dichotomy in much writing on the subject, it may be useful to draw attention to its inherent flaws, and to look instead at the alternatives proposed by the civic model.

Implicit in conventional typological classification is the incorrect but common assumption that 'true Roman' cults were only connected with 'true Roman' temples or, conversely, that 'hybrid', 'Gallo-Roman' temples were connected solely with Romanised forms of 'native' cults. Although epigraphical testimonies for the verification of this assumption are few, they demonstrate how untenable this hypothesis is. Let me cite one example. Excavations on the periphery of the Roman colony at Cologne brought to light the foundations of a Gallo-Roman temple in conjunction with two private dedications to Jupiter Optimus Maximus. Clearly, in the context of the colony, continuation from a pre-Roman occupation phase is out of the question. It would make more sense to explain the temple as the focus of a private cult for the supreme god of the Roman empire, in line with the civic model (see below), than as a simple 'visualisation of Celtic conceptions', which is the interpretation suggested by the traditional approach.⁸

It is also wrong to assume that the remains of a pre-Roman sanctuary may be found beneath every Gallo-Roman temple, or that the cults of so-called 'Gallo-Roman' or 'native' deities *always* trace their origins back to the pre-Roman Iron Age.⁹ This view does not account for the fact that many 'Gallo-Roman' temples, even those that housed a 'native' or 'Romanised' deity, were not built until Roman times, and then on virgin ground. The temple in the Forêt d'Halatte, itself built in the mid-1st c. and not accompanied by any finds that point to an earlier pre-Roman occupation, is a case in point. To designate such sanctuaries as 'native' somewhat misses the point, and creates a false impression of continuity from the Late Iron Age onwards.

Roman imperialism prescribed the incorporation of particular cults into the public calendar of Roman colonies,¹⁰ but public management of a cult or sanctuary was never the equivalent of the 'top-down' imposition of a *single* empire-wide architectural model. As first shown in P. Horne's study¹¹ and now apparent from the very diverse outcomes of the monumentalisation process in the public sanctuaries at Alba-la-Romaine, Meaux, and Ribemont-sur-Ancre, an endless variety of temple types is extant, rather than three discrete categories. Temples such as the one at Meaux-'La Bauve' cannot be properly classified in accordance with the simple distinctions we generally use. The ingeniously designed plan, with its twin *podium* temples interconnected by a corridor and reached through a triple flight of steps on the three remaining sides, was the unique product of a local experiment, and probably an important source of civic pride. However, through the use of well-known forms of architecture, which any visitor would immediately have recognised as Roman, the temples and their precincts made reference at the same time to the common architectural language of the Roman world. In this way, the great architectural diversity of sanctuaries constitutes an outstanding example of what Roman

7 Compare here the comments by Beard *et al.* (supra n.2) 5 ff., esp. 10-14.

8 A.-B. Follmann-Schultz, "Die römischen Tempelanlagen in der Provinz Germania Inferior," *ANRW* II.18.1 (1986) 688. For the temple, see also 742 f.

9 In particular, J.-L. Brunaux, "Die Keltischen Heiligtümer Nordfrankreichs," in A. Haffner (ed.), *Heiligtümer und Opferkulte der Kelten* (Archäologie in Deutschland, Sonderheft 1995) 55.

10 Beard *et al.* (supra n.2) 313 ff.

11 P. Horne, "Roman or Celtic temples? A case study," in M. Henig and A. King (edd.), *Pagan gods and shrines of the Roman Empire* (OUCA Monog. 8, 1986) 15-24.

imperialism in religious matters ultimately meant to local communities: it enhanced the symbolic construction of local identities that were defined and negotiated in terms of their contrast with the global identity of the world-wide empire to which they belonged.

An examination of the effects of Roman imperialism should also include a discussion of the imperial cult, some forms of which are better known than others. A well-known form is the cult associated with Roman army camps, where (as is so well recorded in the documents from Dura Europos) the imperial calendar was faithfully observed.¹² In the axially-located absidal rooms of the fort's headquarters, which functioned as both the army's treasury and temple, *imagines* (i.e., portable busts of the emperor) were an important focus of regimental worship.¹³ Familiar too are the provincial cults that centred around the Altar of Augustus and Roma at Lyon, and the urban temples associated with municipal forms of the imperial cult in the civic centres.¹⁴ But imperial worship was not confined to the uppermost echelons of the cult-place hierarchy: many large rural sanctuaries (especially those equipped with a theatre) also played a rôle in imperial worship, as we know from the involvement of imperial-cult priests in their construction or embellishment, and from dedications in which the titular god of the sanctuary in question is invoked with a preceding honorific reference to the imperial house or the postponed epithet Augustus.¹⁵ Van Andringa has now added to this picture important evidence which may suggest day-to-day imperial worship in the spatial context of even the most unpretentious Gallo-Roman temple. For me, the finest part of the book is his excellent analysis (28-44) of the *pièce de résistance*, an inconspicuous ceramic vessel featuring an unusual image.

This pot, which is preserved in fragments, was recovered during rescue excavations from a *vicus* located not on but near a major road leading from Bavai, the capital of the Nervii, almost 30 km away. There have only been limited excavations in the *vicus*, but nothing points to a settlement endowed with the civic amenities of theatre or baths typical of the large rural sanctuaries mentioned above. On one side, the vessel shows a cross-section of a Gallo-Roman temple with a cult statue of Mercury in the *cella*, and a bust under each of the ambulatories. The image is duplicated on the other side of the pot with, in between the two temple representations, a burning altar as well as a snake and the two animals of Mercury, a cock and a goat. Van Andringa argues convincingly that the busts probably represent *imagines* of the emperor. While the *cella* is reserved for the cult-statue of the titular deity, the image of the emperor (fully in keeping with Roman practice) is relegated to a secondary position, to the portico of the temple.¹⁶ It is an attractive suggestion to associate the image with the epigraphically attested cults of Augustan gods or with the stereotypical vows that were pledged for gods of local panthea on behalf of the emperor.¹⁷ The great number of such vows, of both a private and public nature, suggests that the custom must have been widespread. The image on the pot implies that the porticoes of any unpretentious Gallo-Roman temple may have constituted the normal spatial contexts for the offerings on behalf of the emperor or other

12 R. O. Fink, A. S. Hoey and W. F. Snyder, "The *Feriale Duranum*," *YCS* 7 (1940) 1-222.

13 Th. Pekáry, "Das Opfer vor dem Kaiserbild," *Bj* 186 (1986) 91-103; G. Alföldy, "Die Inschriften aus den Principia des Alenkastells Aalen," *Fundberichte aus Baden-Württemberg* 14 (1989) 293-338; O. Stoll, "Die Fahnenwache in der römischen Armee," *ZPE* 108 (1995) 107-18 [repr. in id., *Römisches Heer und Gesellschaft. Gesammelte Beiträge 1991-1999* (Mavors 13, Stuttgart 2001) 47-58]. The double function of the headquarters' most central rooms is revealed in their epigraphical designation as *aeraria* and as *capitolium*, *caesareum*, *aedes* or *domus signorum*. Cf. Alföldy *ibid.*, with further refs.

14 D. Fishwick, *The imperial cult in the Latin West. Studies in the ruler cult of the western provinces of the Roman Empire* (EPRO 108, Leiden 1987-92); H. Hänlein-Schäfer, *Veneratio Augusti. Eine Studie zu den Tempeln des ersten römischen Kaisers* (Archaeologica 39, Roma 1985).

15 Fishwick *ibid.* 1991, 446 ff.; M. Fincker and F. Tassaux, "Les grands sanctuaires "ruraux" d'Aquitaine et le culte impérial," *MEFRA* 104 (1992) 41-76.

16 At Ribemont-sur-Ancre, numerous fragments of one or more monumental gilded statues, probably representing the emperor, have been found just in front of the temple: Brunaux *et al.* (*supra* n.1) 237.

17 For this, see Fishwick *ibid.* 1991, 446-54 and 423-35, respectively.

members of the imperial family so well attested by Latin epigraphy. In fact, recently discovered graffiti scratched in the wall-plaster of a Gallo-Roman temple at Châteauneuf (Savoie) bear witness to such a votive practice. Private citizens pledged their vows for the emperor's well-being under the portico of this temple, which was dedicated to Mercury and Maia.¹⁸ Needless to say, the imperial images that were the focus of this form of worship have rarely been preserved. While cast metal examples have been melted down,¹⁹ painted portraits on wooden panels (probably the most common form of imperial image) will simply have perished. Van Andringa is certainly right to conclude (40) that the portico in the Gallo-Roman temple had a liturgical rôle rather than one in some kind of 'Celtic' rite of circumambulation. The new evidence presented leaves us with no option than to conclude that the boundaries between the initial categories of 'Roman' and 'native' had quickly become so blurred that the concepts associated with them were no longer adequate to describe the new situation.

We need only compare some of the earlier preliminary reports with the articles now published to see how the understanding of the stratigraphy and lay-out of the Roman complex at Ribemont with its monumental temple and its porticoed squares has improved.²⁰ This is not to say that I am convinced by everything reported about this site. Brunaux's new hypothesis — that the origin of the sanctuary at Ribemont can be traced back to a trophy erected on a battlefield — may sound attractive but cannot be verified with the evidence now available.²¹ The use of historical and numismatic evidence to arrive at an ethnic identification (138-39) of the parties involved in the battle (Belgic Gauls and Aulerici) is methodologically unacceptable. With regard to an impressive building that has been interpreted as a 'storage room' for the decapitated bodies of the besieged army, I would like to see evidence in the form of post-holes or the like: at present, the reconstruction relies almost exclusively on the distribution and condition of the human remains (137).²² These criticisms aside, we should be grateful to Brunaux and his team for sharing with us their knowledge (of necessity imperfect at this stage) of this site. Some of the credit should also go to Van Andringa, whose work seems to have stimulated discussion among the team.²³ Hopefully, it will do the same among the readers of these pages.

Archeologisch Instituut, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

18 Ch. Mermet, "Le sanctuaire gallo-romain de Châteauneuf (Savoie)," *Gallia* 50 (1993) 95-138.

19 Cf. above n.16.

20 Compare, for instance, J.-L. Cadoux, "Organisation spatiale et chronologie du sanctuaire de Ribemont-sur-Ancre (Somme)," in J.-L. Brunaux (ed.), *Les sanctuaires celtiques et leurs rapports avec le monde méditerranéen* (1991) 156-63, and Brunaux (supra n.9) with Brunaux *et al.* (supra n.1) and the paper in the present volume.

21 It is unclear why former interpretations of the site are now being dismissed. The argument (135) that according to historical sources 'the Gauls "erected trophies much in the same way as the Greeks did", that is to say on the battlefield', cannot be decisive.

22 As I understand it, the sole feature is a partially preserved trench for a foundation beam. For an evocative reconstruction, see Brunaux *et al.* (supra n.1).

23 As Brunaux frankly acknowledges in both reports.